

## **When Motherhood Doesn't Go the Way You Planned**

*1 Samuel 1*

### **"The Day That Isn't Simple"**

Mother's Day is a beautiful day.

It is a day filled with gratitude, love, celebration, memories, and honor. Scripture teaches us to honor those who have nurtured, cared for, sacrificed for, and shaped our lives.

But if we are honest, Mother's Day is not simple for everyone.

For some, this is a joyful day. For others, it is a painful one. And for many, it is somehow both at the same time.

Some are celebrating motherhood. Some are grieving a mother they deeply miss. Some are carrying burdens for children who have wandered far from the Lord. Some are exhausted from the demands of parenting. Some long to become mothers and are still waiting. Some carry quiet disappointment because life has not unfolded the way they imagined it would.

And that is why Hannah's story matters so much.

Because Hannah's story is not a story of idealized motherhood. It is a story about faith in the middle of disappointment. It is about what happens when life does not go the way you planned.

### **I. The Pain: When Expectations Become Wounds**

The opening verses of 1 Samuel introduce us to Hannah, and immediately we discover something painful about her story.

Verse 2 says: "Hannah had no children."

To modern ears, that may sound like a simple detail. But in Hannah's world, barrenness carried enormous spiritual, emotional, and social weight.

Children were viewed as God's blessing of legacy, security, and identity. So, Hannah is not simply disappointed. She is carrying deep shame and grief.

People would've wondered why a god or gods or Yahweh had determined to keep her from the blessing of motherhood. They might have assumed it was something she did or her parents that angered God. Except she knows it was nothing she did. She is a model of piety and faith. Despite how difficult this is, she continues to trust in God.

And what makes it harder is that she lives with a daily reminder of what she does not have. She shares her husband with another wife named Peninnah. Peninnah provokes her "year after year."

Can you imagine that? Not a one-time hurt. Not a passing comment. Year after year. The pain keeps reopening.

And then Elkanah, her husband, tries to comfort her: "Am I not more to you than ten sons?" He loves her. But he does not understand her.

And sometimes that is one of the hardest parts of pain. It is not simply the suffering itself, but the loneliness that comes with it.

To feel unseen. To be misunderstood. It feels like no one fully grasps the weight your heart is carrying.

Verse 7 says: "She wept and would not eat."

This is not mild sadness. This is grief that settled into her soul. And some people in this room understand that kind of pain.

Many of you know the pain that comes when the prayer that you've been praying for a while has not been answered the way you hoped. Some of you know the hurt that comes from a relationship that has not healed. Others know the grief of a family situation that has not changed. And still others here know the sadness of the life dream that simply never unfolded.

Some of the deepest grief in life comes not from what happened, but from what never happened. The broken friendships. The missed opportunities. The causes that were lost even though none of it was your own doing.

But church, hear this carefully: **God is not absent in prolonged pain.**

Just because the waiting is long does not mean God has left you.

## **II. The Prayer — When You Pour Out Your Soul**

In verse 9, Hannah does something deeply important. She goes to the house of the Lord.

Pain can drive us in different directions. Sometimes suffering pushes people away from God. Sometimes it hardens the heart. Sometimes it silences prayer altogether.

But Hannah does something wise in her pain. She moves toward God. She forces herself into God's presence. For many of us, making yourself read the Bible, pray, go to church, taking your turn in ministry rotations, that all becomes harder to do when you are dealing with this long-term grief.

And sometimes we fail to recognize grief because nobody died. Sorrow and pain is not limited to funerals. Grief is not limited to death.

Sometimes we grieve seasons of life that ended too quickly; we grieve opportunities that slipped away and friendships that faded; we grieve children growing up and moving away and marriages that changed; we grieve dreams that never materialized or homes we had to leave; and we can grieve the versions of the life we thought we would have by now but don't.

There are losses that never come with casseroles, sympathy cards, or funeral services. And yet those losses hurt deeply. Sometimes the deepest grief is grieving a life you imagined but never lived. And what makes long-term pain especially difficult is that it slowly wears on the soul.

A sudden crisis can shock you. But ongoing disappointment can exhaust you. It can quietly erode hope. You keep praying. You keep waiting. You keep showing up. And eventually the question becomes: "Lord... how long?"

I once heard someone say that long-term suffering is less like being hit by a crashing wave and more like standing beneath a slow drip of water.

At first, a drip seems insignificant. But over time even a small drip can wear through stone. That is what prolonged pain can do to a person. It's not always dramatic. It's not always visible. But it is constant.

And some people in this room are tired not because of one terrible day, but because of years of carrying the same burden.

Yet Hannah teaches us something important: Faith is not pretending the drip doesn't exist. Faith is continuing to bring your weary heart before God even when the pain has lasted longer than you expected.

And that is why Hannah's encounter with God matters so much. Because before her circumstances changed, God met her in the middle of the waiting.

And when she prays, it is not polished or rehearsed. Verse 10 says: "She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly." This is raw honesty. This is not pretending to be okay.

And then Eli the priest misunderstands her and assumes she is drunk. Because even good spiritual people can misread and misunderstand deep pain.

But Hannah answers: "I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord."

That phrase is the center of this entire section. She is not performing. Long-term pain drains of that pretense. She is not pretending. It takes more energy than she has to act like "everything's fine." No, Hannah is has moved beyond performing and pretending. She is doing something only the truly faithful child of God finds themselves doing: Pouring out.

And perhaps some of us need to hear this today: God is not looking for polished prayers. He invites honest hearts. Some people have stopped praying honestly. Not because they stopped believing in God but because they became afraid to say what they were really feeling.

But Scripture gives us permission to bring grief, disappointment, confusion, longing, frustration, and even sorrow before the Lord.

God would rather hear your brokenhearted honesty instead of your polished silence or your fake and phony bumper sticker theology.

### **III. The Presence — When God Meets You Before He Changes Your Circumstances**

Then something remarkable happens. Eli blesses Hannah and says: "Go in peace..."

And verse 18 says: “Her face was no longer sad.” Now notice something carefully. Nothing has changed yet.

She is still barren. The prayer is still unanswered. The situation is still unresolved. So why has her countenance changed?

Because she encountered God. And this is the turning point of the story. The turning point is not Samuel’s birth. The turning point is God’s presence.

Church, hear this truth: **God’s presence is not postponed until your prayer is answered.**

Some people are waiting to experience peace after the answer comes. But God offers Himself before the answer arrives. This is resurrection-shaped living. Hope before resolution. Peace before circumstances change. Presence before provision. And some of us need that reminder today.

Because we have quietly believed: “Once things improve, then I’ll have peace.” But God says: “I will meet you in the middle of the waiting.”

And throughout Scripture, we discover that some of God’s people eventually came to desire His presence even more than the immediate resolution of their circumstances.

Moses is one example. In Exodus 33, Israel has sinned greatly with the golden calf. God tells Moses that He will still send them toward the Promised Land but His presence will not go with them.

And Moses responds with one of the most powerful prayers in Scripture: “If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here.”

Think about that. Moses essentially says: “I would rather stay in the wilderness with God than enter the Promised Land without Him.”

Because at some point, Moses learned that the presence of God was greater than the destination itself. If God told you that you could have this destination that you’ve been focused on for so long, but you were no longer going to have His presence, would you do what Moses did? Would you say,

“Then scrap it. Because if I am not walking with you, I don’t want that destination.”

David understood this too. In Psalm 51, after his sin and collapse, David does not first pray: “Restore my kingdom.” Or “Fix my reputation.”

Instead, he cries: “Cast me not away from your presence. “Why?

Because David understood that losing God’s presence would be a greater tragedy than losing comfort, success, or security.

And then there is the apostle Paul. Paul prayed repeatedly for God to remove his “thorn in the flesh.” We do not know exactly what it was, but we know it caused ongoing pain.

And God’s answer was not immediate removal. Instead, God said: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

In other words: “Paul, I may not remove this immediately, but I will give you Myself in the middle of it.” And eventually Paul comes to understand that the sustaining presence of Christ is stronger than the unresolved pain.

Church, this is one of the deepest mysteries of faith: Sometimes God calms the storm. And sometimes God reminds us that He is with us in the boat.

Sometimes He changes the circumstance. And sometimes He changes us in the middle of the circumstance. That is what is happening with Hannah.

Before God changes her situation, God steadies her soul. Before the provision comes, His presence meets her in her pain. And maybe that is the invitation for some of us today: Not simply to seek God for answers, but to seek Him for Himself.

#### **IV. The Provision — When God Gives More Than an Answer**

Eventually, God does answer Hannah’s prayer and Samuel is born.

But the deepest miracle is not simply that Hannah receives a child. The deepest miracle is what God has done in Hannah herself.

Because when Samuel is old enough, Hannah brings him back to the Lord and says: “For this child I prayed...” And then she gives him back to God.

Think about that. The very thing she longed for most is the very thing that she places back into God's hands. Why?

Because long suffering had transformed her trust. And that is often God's deeper work in our lives. Sometimes we think the answer is the greatest gift. But often the deeper gift is learning to trust God in ways we never could before.

Faith does not only receive from God. Faith trusts Him enough to release.

And perhaps that is where some people are today: releasing children into God's hands. Maybe you need to release expectations. Perhaps you need to let go and release outcomes. Maybe you need to release control and trust God with unfinished stories.

Hannah commissioned her most valuable earthly treasure, Samuel, back into God's service. This meant once Samuel was old enough to care for himself, he lived full time at the tabernacle. Are you able to commission your most valuable earthly treasure back into God's hands, to be used however He wishes?

Hannah's story points us forward to another mother. Mary stood at the foot of a cross watching her son suffer.

Unable to stop it. Unable to change it. And in that moment, it looked like hope had failed. Mary must've thought that the story was over and the promise the angel had made had died.

But three days later, resurrection came. And the God who brought life to Hannah's empty place is the same God who raised Jesus from the grave.

So, to all you mommas with hurting hearts, to all of you anyones here today grieving and hurting, remember that God still brings life out of sorrow, out of waiting, out of disappointment, and out of empty places.

Today, wherever you find yourself: celebrating, grieving, waiting, exhausted, thankful, hurting, God knows your situation better than you. God hears you. God loves you. God welcomes you. And God's presence is not postponed until your prayer is answered.